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ABSTRACT

This paper narrates the history of a young printer, John Prentiss, who established the New Hampshire Sentinel in 1799--a paper which remains a community newspaper today. Examples of writing from Prentiss's training and experience explain why he was able to survive in newspaper publishing when others failed. Acknowledging that the United States today is vastly different from the original thirteen states, the paper attempts to find the similarities that still exist in producing a credible publication. (HAI)

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A PRENTISS PRINTER
or
How to Start a Newspaper That Lasts 176 Years

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A PRENTISS PRINTER

The nation's Bicentennial finds the editor back in the printing business. New graphics developments and electronic devices have returned to him the direct control over the printed page. Like his 18th century counterpart, he must know how the processes work.

The intervening century had done much to isolate the editor from his community, and therefore from the trust of the readers he served. In newsgathering, as in other spheres, bigness was taken to equal goodness. Bigness gave clout and bigness made the money to become bigger and therefore better.

Reporters and editors could then mingle with the great – and with each other mingling with the great. They became insulated, like a TV anchorman at a New Hampshire primary. Credibility gradually became an issue and ordinary folk began to fear manipulation by these mammoths.

At the same time typographical inventions drove the editor out of the "back shop" lest he get his hands burnt or his fingers pounded. At worst, he became an intellectual exquisite – "a gentleman from the Times." At best, he had only a layman's idea of the mechanical process.

Lately, however, cold type, computer setting, impulse typography, VDET, CAM, FPCS and other alphabetical wonders have knocked down the wall between the newsroom and the back shop, and returned to the editor full technical flexibility to manipulate the printed page according to his needs.

Moreover, not all of these devices are prohibitively expensive, so ventures in community newspapering become once more attractive. New publications gain interest from experiment, and flexibility from knowledge of the new processes.

In the early years of the American republic a similar situation existed. An editor fared better if he were first a printer and second a participating member of the community, known and trusted by his readers. John Prentiss, who founded the New Hampshire Sentinel in 1799, was almost typically such a man.

One of the values of a bicentennial celebration is a chance to reexamine first principles – somewhat in the way the Supreme Court continues to draw strength from the Constitution. By studying the careers of men like young John Prentiss, it may be possible to identify and reaffirm some values useful today.

Prentiss came to Keene in 1799 to begin his weekly paper. Its successor, the daily Keene Sentinel, continues to serve the same southwestern New Hampshire community. Keene has grown from 1,645 inhabitants to more than 20,000; the Sentinel from 75 circulation to more than 10,000. Neither has outgrown the other. Perhaps part of the reason can be found in the nature and training of John Prentiss, printer.

"For more than fifty years," wrote the town's historian, Gen. Simon G. Griffin, in 1899, "Mr. Prentiss wielded a powerful influence in the town and county. He was often radical in his views, but no one doubted his honesty." [A637]

The New York Times, complimenting him in 1866, noted that he was still "wielding his pen." [B3] In 1870 he wrote his "Autobiographical and Historical Recollections of Eighty-Eight Years."

*Citations are bibliographical by letter and page number.

"In the midst of the national distress, the dark period [of the Revolutionary War] I was born," he recalled, "the house being full of soldiers." [D1]

John was the third son of a Massachusetts minister who had 13 children. Only thrift and hard work kept the family clothed and fed, but later John recalled his childhood as a pleasant and exciting time. He grew up in the first years of the republic, and in a locale not far removed from the centers of activity then existing in Massachusetts.

His father, a liberal preacher, had supported the patriot cause and ever. fought at Concord. Although the family had to raise both food and clothing, the Rev. Caleb Prentiss was a Harvard graduate and had been the college's librarian. There was no lack of reading matter. John's early interests he recalled as reading, spelling, geography, and history. He followed the newspapers from an early age.

> I was at this time about ten years old and it was a feast to read the Centinel, conducted by Maj. [Benjamin] Russell in Boston, on its punctual arrival to learn the progress making in the Constitution's adoption. Maj. R. had procured engraved blocks, or pillars of the thirteen States, and as each state, in Convention adopted the Constitution it was placed in an erect attitude. Other States were represented, according to the known progress, some half-way up and others beginning to rise; and again others flat – and so changed from week to week. [C24]

Anyone who doubts the effectiveness of graphics in reinforcing a message should note that this simple device was recalled 82 years later. The boy also received vivid early impressions of economy and inflation, in the debtors' troubles that led to Shays' rebellion.

> I remember a conversation between my father and a parishioner at this period – one suggested that he did not believe that fifty dollars could be raised in specie, (the only circulating medium) while the other doubted even half that sum could be realized. [C20]

Later on, Prentiss was to have some experience as a "distressed debtor."

Gaining Experience in Boston

In 1792, having "taken great interest in politics at home, and especially in the progress of the French Revolution of 1789, and desired much to be a Printer," John was apprenticed to Thomas Adams, publisher of the Independent Chronicle of Boston. [C36]

The Chronicle, with its motto "Truth its guide, Liberty its object," was devoted to a different truth from the one young Prentiss had learned at home. Adams' paper was egalitarian in the extreme; had even demanded the suppression of the Society of the Cincinnati as tending to create a nobility in the new nation. It later adopted the Jeffersonian view of French activities, bitterly opposed by Major Benjamin Russell's Centinel. [F294]

The apprentice did not adopt the master's position, remaining instead firm in the Federalist view he had absorbed at home. But he liked and respected the man himself.

> On one occasion (for I had taken a great interest in political affairs, with the new and striking events of the French progressing revolution) I left the office, without leave, to see how the election of Representative to Congress went on . . .. I plunged in amongst the crowd in the hall, and who should I run across but my "Master." I felt cheap and expected a reprimand. But instead of that he met me pleasantly, and made some remark as if pleased to see me interested. [C40]

Of his work in the printing office Prentiss had little to say in his "Recollections," seven decades later. There had been too many pulls on the press between. He merely remarked that it was "a somewhat hard task, for soon

the paper was published semi-weekly and half of two nights kept the boys up."

John W. Moore says the Chronicle was printed on a Ramage press, but that was after John had left. Adam Ramage's improvements were in frame and bed however; the screw still required two pulls to the sheet.

"The palms of my hands became partially calloused the first 10 years," Prentiss recalled, "from the pressing of the screw of the old printing presses, and the callouses did not disappear until late in life."

Moore does describe succinctly the other work the apprentices learned.

> The inking apparatus consisted of a board, say fifteen inches square, upon which the ink was spread, and two balls (about ten inches in diameter made of well-trodden sheeps' pelts stuffed with wool), which required considerable strength to handle, afforded a means of distributing the ink when taken from the table, which was done by vigorously beating them together with a sort of rolling movement, turning them a little at a time so as to make the ink cover the entire surface, and so to beat the press so perfectly that neither monks nor friars should appear on the printed sheet. About 250 sheets were thus printed on one side in an hour, one man working the press and another the balls, and changing places every hour. [E81]

Prentiss was later said to have "limbs rather slender, but with an ample chest," possibly acquired by beating the ink balls together. (Monks were splotches of ink on the printed page and friars were white or pale patches.)

It is unlikely that the younger apprentices worked on the press or the inking when important jobs were under way. But Adams allowed them to do minor job printing on scrap paper, along with the more traditional sale of refuse paper each week. These sources, combined with the customary New Years Day gifts to the boys who delivered the newspapers, allowed John to realize $4, $12 and $20, in each of three years he served.

He put his funds to work, instead of "regaling the office," as Moore says many apprentices did. Under his contract, he was to "find his own clothing, except shoes." Therefore:

> Instead of spending it foolishly and knowing that my father could ill afford to supply me I laid out the principal part in things I absolutely needed for the body . . .. Insomuch that after the first year, I relieved my parents of other expense than occasionally to make up new garments which I procured, too, all ready for the needle. [C41]

The traditional Yankee lessons of honesty, thrift and hard work the young man had learned at home; the apprentice system merely reinforced them.

Boston in 1792 was an absorbing milieu for a young man. A major seaport, it was exposed to the rowdier elements from abroad. Their ideas collided with the entrenched mercantilism of the leading families. Perhaps more than other localities in the United States at the time, it offered a mingling of opposites, an emulsion that was continually on the point of separation or explosion.

The newspaper office, and the errands John Prentiss ran for Thomas Adams, gave him an unusual opportunity to observe. His own political bent helped him to analyse what he saw. There emerged, after all the impressions and arguments were synthesized, an outlook surprisingly in harmony with his future community of Keene – a town that had progressed from frontier equality far along the road to mercantile aristocracy.

There was, however, another experience to go into the making of Keene's longtime printer. The needs of his family called him away before his apprenticeship was complete.

Leominster Interlude

> I rather reluctantly left in the fall of 1795. My brother had that year graduated, with distinguished eclat, at Cambridge and was too earnest to establish a paper at Leominster (Mass.) . . . to be put off – and my services were all essential. I was never satisfied that the decision was correct, tho' Mr. Adams made no objections. C42

In his "Recollections" John Prentiss was comparatively brief about the Leominster period. His older brother's entry into journalism had proved less than triumphant. Charles had been the intellectual son, destined for the ministry. He had been educated at considerable cost in terms of what his father could afford. At Harvard he had become a leading literary figure to his classmates. But one year of teaching school to gain funds for further study had seemed to him more than enough.

The graduate then "succeeded in means [a euphemism for 'borrowed funds from his father'] to purchase a Press and type sufficient for the newspaper he had set his heart upon . . . and with the assistance of a journeyman [ex-apprentice John] made shift to get out a paper of small size in October of 1795, the 'Rural Repository'." C61

It was to be literary, to titillate the educated and to instruct the farmer. William Nelson's remark that it lasted longer than "might reasonably have been expected" is explained by John Prentiss' comment that "about 100 students at Cambridge were patrons." F356 C61

The paper was nearly a one-man show – John received no mention on the masthead. At any rate, "safe dependence on a number of literary friends, and his conviction that most would be willing to patronize and encourage so laudable an attempt," proved a delusion. Charles' prospectus suggested that, if readers found the paper dull, they had merely to grant "a discontinuance of their favors." Joseph T. Buckingham, newspaper annalist, commented:

> This is rather cool and philosophical. Whether Mr. Prentiss's philosophy reconciled him to the early death of his Repository, or not, is not known to the writer, but the paper was short-lived. One cannot avoid smiling at the simplicity of a youth, fresh from college, with no experience of the many nameless expenses, that, in a printing office, swallow up an income, promising himself success in publishing a merely literary paper in a small country village, and seemingly resolved to exclude advertisements, – the best and surest source of profit, – even if they should be offered. But Mr. Prentiss stands not alone in the catalogue of those, who have indulged in this pleasing but fatal illusion. G268

Nor have they been exactly lacking in the century since Buckingham wrote. Brother John, however, was not among their number. He was watching and learning, as well as printing the paper.

Thus, he would have learned that the fate of a newspaper depends upon its acceptance by the community for which it is intended. He would have learned to keep his head down; that to earn a living by literary efforts depends upon a reputation that is slowly built. He would have learned the pitfalls of political comment and the indispensability of advertising.

The Leominster experience lasted less than three years in all. A second attempt, the Political Focus, with John's name sharing the masthead – and potentially the debts – was shaky from the start.

"Approaching the age of manhood," he wrote later, "I began to look out for No. 1." He heard of a situation in Keene where, "the paper which had been published for several years, under different names and with

different proprietors having been discontinued, I accordingly, in December

evident. But John Prentiss, when he arrived in Keene, was not quite 21 years old. Why

Map (from Griffin--See References) removed due to poor reproducibility.

issued proposals for printing the New Hampshire Centinel." The influence of Major Russell and his Constitutional columns is

should the citizens accept so young and impecunious an editor?[C62]

Opportunity depends upon occasion. Had

Prentiss come to Keene a few decades earlier or a few later, he might not have been successful. The earliest settlers had no need of a paper. Local news moved by word of mouth in 1735, and the town numbered only 756 inhabitants by 1775. Frontier work left little time for any outside affairs. On the other hand, by 1820 capital would have been needed to start a paper, not credit alone. Costs were up and trust was down.

Getting Started at Keene

Keene in 1799, however, was a small, isolated community in which no one had much ready cash. Wealth was in land, exchange was most often in "kind" and people were accustomed to replacing capital by labor. So they were prepared to accept, or at least be sympathetic to, a hardworking young man without much cash.

John, though he lacked formal schooling, had been brought up to believe in its value. Both the lack and the belief were shared by many of the voters of Keene. His printer training and self-education combined with an inbred dignity to make him acceptable to the town's Harvard-educated leaders. He was the son of a minister, which recommended him to the church-going community.

He could turn his hand to many tasks, not only printing, but also gardening, carpentry and even tailoring. Keene's farmers and artisans respected such ability – the basis of "Yankee ingenuity." Moreover, he was politically alert, as the townsmen had come to be since Independence, and of the same mind generally. The guiding principles of the American Revolution – by then conservative – were still acceptable in Keene. The excesses of the more violent and urban French Revolution were not. In the new nation every man had political identity, and in Keene the gulf between rich and poor was not yet wide enough to encourage Jacobinism.

Gen. Griffin describes the village as it was when John Prentiss first saw it. He lists merchants and lawyers, doctors and small manufacturers. On "Federal Row ... Luther Smith made clocks and Peter Wilder made rakes." There was a blacksmith, a clothing factory, a saw mill, a grist mill, a saddler and "Alexander Ralston had a distillery down the Packersfield Road." Keene was on the drovers' route and a mail stop between Boston, Vermont and Montreal. There were taverns everywhere – "nearly every merchant and trader, and several others, were licensed retailers of intoxicating drinks." Winters were cold in New Hampshire.

There was an apothecary shop and a peg shop, which shipped shoe pegs all over the world for a century. Deacon Abijah Wilder, the man from whom Prentiss was to buy his printing equipment, was a cabinet-maker and inventor, who is credited with designing the first aqueduct into Boston.[A308-310]

There had been four abortive attempts to start newspapers in Keene, the first two by the same man. In 1787, James Davenport Griffith, a Bostonian, moved his press to Keene at the request of 95 citizens and began the New Hampshire Recorder and Weekly Advertiser.

Nelson calls it the first newspaper in the western part of the state. It was printed on thick, coarse paper, 20 by 15, folded once to make four pages. The three columns occupied about 8½ by 13 inches. A spirited American eagle graced the nameplate.[F382]

Griffith's attempt limped for want of support. Early in the next year he was advertising "with reluctance" that the 95 citizens who had invited him to Keene had yet to pay the cost of one paper. At nine

shillings per annum ($1.50 then), the Recorder lasted only two years and a half. Griffith remained, doing job printing. He had the press and type.

Two years later he tried again with the Cheshire Advertiser – same format. The Advertiser died from a "great declension of advertisements." Another trouble was the shortage of newsprint which had to be hauled from a source near Boston. Griffith encouraged the establishment of a paper mill at Alstead, just north of Keene, but the help came too late. He sold out and left town. No one seems to have paid much attention. He was an outsider using his own money and machinery, and thus lacked leverage.

Keene's next venture had better hope of success. It was operated by two members of the Blake family – and a Blake had built in the original settlement. Henry was a printer and William Ward Blake kept a tavern. News prospects were good. And owing a Blake was a mite different from owing an outsider. [A309]

The press is likely to have been the same, but the stock and typography were better. The nameplate announced the Columbian Intelligencer and the body type ranks as a 7-point on 9 leading. It was a well-edited paper that attracted some local notice. Nevertheless, it lasted only until 1795, when Henry died and his brother sold out to a combine.

Cornelius Sturtevant, Jr., & Co., publishers of Keene's ambitious new Rising Sun, had been a journeyman printer for thhe Blakes. His father was a successful farmer in Keene and one of his partners was Abijah Wilder. Sturtevant was not only a printer, but also showed a flair for the invective that passed for political debate at the time. [F610]

The Rising Sun was printed on a sheet 18 by 22 inches, with a simple nameplate. It took its name from the local Masonic lodge, started by the Blakes. At first it seemed to prosper, but lasted only from August 21, 1795, to May 24, 1798. Sturtevant moved to the branch printing office in Putney, Vt., leaving Elijah Cooper in charge at Keene. Keene's subscribers were slow in paying and the partnership broke up in litigation, leaving Wilder in possession of the machinery.

When young John Prentiss climbed down from the closed sleigh that served as a winter stagecoach it did not take him long to discover that publishing his "Centinel" would be no sinecure.

> There was an old Screw Press, very old, and two old, broken fonts of type, also very old. These had fallen into the hands of old Dea. Wilder, who had been in some way connected with the Establishment – had probably lent the Proprietors money. He wanted to sell as much as I wanted to buy. He would sell, for only $250 – but he wanted security; I had none to offer . . .. I would give my note or I would not purchase. [C65]

It looked like a Yankee standoff. The young man knew his position was weak; he may have known Wilder's was weaker. Prentiss had no money; for him the choice was credit or no sale. The deacon, on the other hand, was saddled with a collection of antique printing equipment he couldn't operate, against a background of three newspaper failures in ten years. He couldn't afford to hold out for security.

This local economic pressure was one of Prentiss' advantages. He was an outsider, but with a difference. He had not come directly from Boston, but from nearby Leominster, where the paper's reputation had outrun its performance. Moreover, the Political Focus still appeared solvent and his name was on the masthead. And, he was a minister's son with Harvard connections.

Two of Keene's three lawyers had been Harvard contemporaries of the Rev. Caleb Prentiss, and were disposed to assist the son.

Atty. Noah Cooke, class of 1769, was Abijah Wilder's legal adviser. Prentiss described the outcome in his recollections.

> The good Deacon consulted his friend, Squire Noah Cooke, who remembered my father in College and who was afterwards a very kind friend many times when a loan of $20 or so was important. The Deacon finally concluded to run the risk that he might eventually realize his $250, tho' punctuality could hardly be expected. (Note: the notes were all satisfactorily paid, tho' not "punctually.") C66

Writing in 1862 in his "Memoranda," Prentiss explained that: "The notes (3) were on demand and old Squire Cooke, his attorney, wrote on the backs of each 'This note is not to be used unless there is evident danger of losing it'!" Cooke's accounts show: "March 27, 1799. Abijah Wilder, Dr. – to drawing writings between him and Prentiss ... 15 cents." D7-8

Another advantage favoring Prentiss has been used by young publishers since: the clear result of foreclosure – repossessing used machinery – would deter his creditor as long as there was a chance of repayment.

The would-be publisher now had a start, but he was far from ready to get out an issue. In the failing February light he had to poke through the dust and debris in the old print shop, four doors up from Blake's tavern – dirty business at best. Moreover, the Sun had set in a blaze of legal fireworks, so Cooper may have extracted things.

At any rate, the justice of Prentiss' complaint about "old miserable types" is apparent for all to see, since he had to use some of them to get variety in his first issues. Although type had been founded in America since 1768, and successfully since 1787, it was still costly. Prentiss lacked even enough to fill a form, but he also lacked money. The rough justice of his solution may have made up in some degree for having had to leave Boston early. E19

"My brother," he explained, "had a fount of long primer type the suitable size, not so much worn, and I took it; he accounting to father." That was satisfaction – but he still needed paper. Here his Leominster reputation helped.

> I took part of a keg of ink from my brother and the Papermakers [Nichols & Kendall] of Leominster said they would risk trusting me with a few reams of paper to begin with. I then visited my father at Reading [Mass., and] recounted my doings. With many good wishes and words more valuable than silver, he gave me thirty dollars he had saved and was sorry he could do no more. C66

The gift was not only welcome, but essential. There is no evidence it was ever repaid, or intended to be. Despite young Prentiss' knack of getting credit without security, some items had to be on a cash basis.

> After paying all the expenses of travelling and transport and sundry necessary articles which I needed to complete the establishment, cuts of farms, houses and horses, I took board at Blake's Tavern . . . on the first week in March and proceeded to get things in order in the one-story building . . . with a Cash Capital of a Five Dollar Bill of the Union Bank, Boston, the last of the thirty dollars. C67

The influence of Russell's Columbian Centinel on John Prentiss is constant. He had proposed, indeed, to publish at Keene a paper called the "Centinel." At this point, however, the young printer got his first taste of the truism: "Everyone in town knows how to put out a paper better than the editor."

> But before the first newspaper was issued, Judge Newcomb, then an eminent man in Keene, a college acquaintance of my father's . . . asked me by what authority I substituted the "C" for an "S"? I really could give no

> other authority than Maj. Russell and so I seasonably changed the letter . . .. I subsequently heard . . . that the major, like other stout boys, was also pinched for materials when he started his first enterprise (for all types were then imported) and in picking out his capitals for the heading of his paper in the only suitable type he had, the Capital S was not to be found and so he substituted the C !! C62

The anecdote explains a spelling variation that has plagued historians to this day. Frank Luther Mott explains it as a common 18th Century variation, and John Tebbel's editors persist in their reference to the "Columbian Centennial."

At any rate, Prentiss had sense enough not to debate minor matters. When the paper's nameplate was set it was Sentinel. The other variation "Newhampshire" traces to Isaiah Thomas and Noah Webster, whose pride in the new national identity led them to purge references to British place names.

How the Paper Appeared

Prentiss' motto, a feature of contemporary newspapers, was simple and straightforward – English, not French or Latin. "My Country's Good – A Faithful Watch I Stand."

The new publisher was able to hire a "young man who had some experience in the office" – reputedly a Blake. "But on collecting the subscription papers I could number only about seventy-five known and open supporters of the enterprise."

It was enough for a start. "No one paid in advance, but on the other hand, for a season, until pay-day came, I had no other expenses than my board and small wages for my assistant." How small may be judged from John Moore's assessment of journeyman's wages in 1819: "15 cents for setting 1,000 ems and 5 cents for distributing the same [to the cases when breaking up a page] . . . and for press work the pay of a journeyman was 12½ cents a token, say 250 sheets [four pulls to the sheet]." C67 E81

John was working on his first issue when he turned 21 on Thursday, March 19, 1799. The paper came out on Saturday. The stage with the mail reached Keene on Thursday, so that night he must have devoted to the gleaning and setting of the "Contents of Thursday Night's Mail," a column on page 3 that served as stop-press and the wire service of its day.

Prentiss led the column with his prospectus, setting forth publications schedule, costs of subscription and advertising (commodities welcome) and an offer to do job printing. Nelson calls it the "prospectus of an experienced printer." F62

It is just that. The new publisher never planned to rest his success on literary ability. He clearly regarded himself as more printer than writer, following the conservative practice of earlier years.

"My first customer was my near neighbor, Capt. [Abel] Blake, who sent in a 9/ [shilling] advertisement and brot me a load of wood, then 9/ a cord to pay for a year's subscription." Prentiss was getting about 37½ cents per inch, by modern count. The first Sentinel carried a full column of ads, but only 11 inches are likely to have been paying propositions. C67

Graphically, the first Newhampshire Sentinel bears a closer resemblance to the Rising Sun than to either the Columbian Centinel or the Political Focus. Some reasons suggest themselves. Among them are the peculiarity of the press itself; the habits of the young man hired to help, and the probable condition of the available type. The new long primer, though easily identified, matched a type earlier used by Sturtevant quite closely. He may have taken it with him. By modern standards, Prentiss' paper looks crowded, but

paper costs demanded little leading when news was heavy.

One possible reason for the format, however, bears directly on the publisher community relationship. Just as a paper's style of writing can be raucous or calm, its format can be dramatic or gentle, even within the limitations of the same equipment.

Two factors determine which alternative is favored: the character of the publisher – particularly if he is also the printer – and the disposition of the community, or at least his assessment of it.

John Prentiss knew of the three previous failures. He could hardly have helped reflecting on why they had occurred. His apprenticeship and his work in Leominster suggest willingness to learn. His reaction to Judge Newcomb's criticism was rational rather than stubborn.

Griffith may have failed through poor business practices and the Blakes certainly withdrew when their printer died. But Sturtevant had clearly used his sharp pen to attack personalities and alienate his readers. Prentiss' first editorial message said "satire and abuse will never enhance a publication of this kind, and ought as much as possible to be avoided."

The appearance of the first Sentinel is conservative – not unlike what the town was used to seeing. It was printed on a slightly oversize crown sheet, which gave it four pages approximately 16½ by 10 inches. Type was arranged in four equal columns of about 14½ picas by 15½ inches. The majority of the type would class today as 10-point without much leading. In spite of Prentiss' recollection of "old miserable type," the front page is fairly evenly set. Thus the body type can be safely identified as the long primer brought from Leominster. Where variety or emphasis required a departure from that font, the lines become irregular and the letters broken. This is especially noticeable on the final literary page, entitled "Orchestre" and in the publisher's message, where a battered 12-point type is used.

The entire front page was devoted to a verbatim report of the Congressional committee on the petition against the Alien and Sedition Laws. It listed the complaints, including one on "laying a duty on stamped vellum, parchment and paper." Other items of national news included a sketch of the proceedings of the House of Representatives, probably lifted from a recent Columbian Centinel – Russell was noted for that sort of summary – and Congress' rejection of a resolution to permit electors to designate which vote was for President and which for Vice President.

The foreign news which followed is three months old, but the winter was a severe one and ship sailings were doubtless delayed. Some "foreign" items had datelines from such exotic lands as Pennsylvania and Connecticut; one, datelined Massachusetts, is actually an account of the arrest of Napper Tandy in Norway after his abortive Irish rebellion.

Doubt of the report of Buonaparte's death in Egypt caused Prentiss to make one of two editorial comments in the issue, outside of the publisher's statement. He suggested waiting until the real situation emerged. The other comment was equally mild.

> The report of the committee to whom were referred sundry petitions against the Alien and Sedition laws . . .. explains in a masterly manner, the object of these laws – answers fully the objections against them, and points out the absolute necessity of their existing at this critical period.

Thus the new publisher quietly took his stand with the Federalists and against the Republicanism of his former master, Adams.

It was a position he was to hold as long as there was any chance of electi..g Federalists.

The final page, Prentiss reserved for entertainment and arguments. He avoided the erudite Classical tags common in his day – Sturtevant, for instance, had called his literary column "Heliconides." Prentiss titled his "Orchestre," which became "Orchestra" as soon as he could improve his type cases.

The rest was "Entertaining Miscellany" to serve notice that the back page was for relaxation. The Saturday publication day was keyed to the leisure time of the readers. The weekend (either Saturday or Sunday night, depending upon the orthodoxy of the church observance) was the only time a hard-working man had to sit and read. Thriftily, the placement served to relax readers to absorb the advertising messages, which appeared in the fourth column, gradually.

"To please everyone is impossible" Prentiss wrote in his introductory message. To offend no one is equally impossible, but in practice the editorial balancing trick is no such easily stated absolute. More men achieve it than can define it, although volumes have been devoted to the subject. Perhaps information is the root and variety is the branch, but community acceptance is the trunk. Without this, no editor can become at all outspoken without the risk of offending too many subscribers at one time.

There is no existing contemporary account available of the reception given the first issue of the Newhampshire Sentinel by the townspeople. Within two months, however, almost all of the former advertisers of the Rising Sun had been won back. "At the end of six months," Prentiss wrote, "my subscriptions had increased to about 250, with a good share of advertisements."

In his final editorial message, 47 years later, he wrote:

> In taking leave of his subscribers after so long and so pleasant an intercourse, (some few of whom remain on the books to this day) he can only say he has honestly endeavored to uphold those great principles in which he was early educated, coming on to the state of action in the life time of Washington.

And, looking back over 200 years of American development, it seems that not only the great principles, but the little traits they engendered and nourished have made the difference. Charismatic figures blaze across the heavens of accomplishment, inspiring others. But equally, the Republic was built on honesty, intellectual curiosity and practical hard work.

Many nations have great newspapers and magazines. The greatness of the United States is supported by many newspapers and magazines – often run by those not too different from John Prentiss – who called himself a printer until his community called him an editor.

All newspaper quotations are from the Sentinel files or the collection of the Antiquarian Society.

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